

The Gospel of John

Week 12

The Feeding of the 5,000 (6.1-14)

1. Introduction and Review

- All information, study notes and related material can be found on the internet at <http://www.rtrc.net/biblestudy/john/john.htm>
- Course Syllabus
- Weekly Outlines (notebook)
- Discussion Forum: <http://www.rtrc.net/forum/> [go to the forum marked "Bible Studies"]
- Audio files are available on the web site

2. Outline for the next two weeks

- This week: Feeding of the 5,000 (6.1-14)
- Next week:
 - Walking on Water (6.15-25)
 - The Bread of Life (6.26-59)

3. Introduction to this week's lesson

- This account is the only one found in all four of the gospels. Each one has a slightly different perspective but they all capture the essence of the miracle.
- Parallel passages: Matthew 14. 13-21; Mark 6.32-44; Luke 9.10-17
- John makes some independent comments relating to this event:
 - The crossing of the sea (verse 1)
 - The approaching Passover (verse 4)
 - The involvement of Philip and Andrew (verses 7-8)
 - The loaves were made of barley (verse 9)
 - Jesus' commands to gather all the fragments (verse 12)
- This miracle is intended more for the instruction of the disciples than it is the multitudes though Jesus uses this event as well in his 4th discourse (6.26ff)

- The allusion to the Old Testament event of Elisha's miraculous feeding cannot be ignored: 2 Kings 4:42-44
 - Explicit verbal links: word translated "lad" used only in the New Testament in verse 9 but used several times in the Septuagint translation of the 2 Kings passage. In this passage it refers to Elisha's servant.
 - Other links: the mention of the barley; the basic unbelief, the command to distribute the loaves and the fact that there were leftovers.
- Together with the link established between the present feeding and God's miraculous feeding of the Israelites in the wilderness in the days of Moses (see 6.31-31) John thus sets Jesus' ministry firmly in the context of salvation history, linking Jesus' signs with the two previous major periods of miraculous activity in the history of God's people: the ministries of Moses and Elijah/Elisha.
- The feeding of the multitudes also conveys the image of Jesus presiding as host over an abundant meal, a theme found already in the Prophets (e.g. Isaiah 25.6) and picked up by Jesus in some of His parables (Matthew 22.1-14; Luke 22.16, 29-30)

4. Background (6.1-4)

- After these things – most likely referring to the miracles and signs of Chapters 4-5 but some scholars place this chapter and events at the end of chapter 4. Consider 5.1 with 4.46
- Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee – John here mentions the name of the Sea in two forms. Galilee was probably the name of the lake as used by locals and referred to in the Christian church. However, it was officially called Tiberias by those residing in the town named after the Emperor. This town was founded in 20 AD and not called as such in the ministerial life of Christ. It was added by John when he wrote the gospel.
- And a great multitudes were following Him – What is important to see here is that in the original these actions found in this verse are continuous. That is, they kept on happening. For instance:
 - The multitudes "kept following" Jesus
 - They "continually" saw His signs
 - They saw the signs that he "habitually" did on the sick and infirmed.

- Another interesting aspect that is recorded in the Synoptics but not here mentioned by the Evangelist: His readers must have been well versed in the Synoptics as John does not record a great number of miracles compared to the other three writers.
- And Jesus went up into the mountain – the exact place of this mountain is unknown (one commentator mentioned the Golem Heights). However, this expression occurs several times in the gospels and in some cases comes at the beginning of a major teaching section, (cp. Matthew 5.1). It is also possible that this phrase simply referred to a “hill country” in that region.
- The Passover was at hand – John presents the final piece of information: The Jewish Passover was near, (verse 4). This will be significant as the story unfolds, for Passover was a time when Jewish people recalled their deliverance from Egypt through Moses and were looking for the Prophet like him who was to come. They expected the Prophet to bring deliverance and provide manna from heaven as Moses has done.

5. The Feeding Miracle (6.5-14)

- Consider Mark 6.32-41
- It seems rather natural that Philip be the one to inquire of the provision of food as he was from this region. (Consider 1.44)
- Verse 6 states that Jesus asked this question to him to “test” him. This word may be used as “to tempt” (as in James 1.13) or “to test, to prove or to try”. Here the meaning is that the Lord wished to give Philip an opportunity to reveal whether he was moved with sympathy for these people and whether he had taken to heart the lessons which the miracles, as signs, were intended to teach.
- The issue is clear – Jesus knew what He was about to do. The question is not one of inquiry. Jesus has every intention of feeding these people. So often in the ministry of Jesus he not only fed the spiritual bodies of the people but he also restored, healed and fed their physical bodies.
 - Application: James 2.14-16

- Philips replies to the hopelessness of the situation. He does not offer a solution but only magnifies the problem. In this case Philip states that “two hundred denarii would not be enough”. This is equal to 200 days wages in that time. Note also that he says that this sum would still not be enough to solve the problem of feeding this multitude of people.
- Philip is not the only disciple who calculates the matter that is before them. Andrew also magnifies the problem by pointing out that there were only 5 loaves and 2 fish for them to use.
 - Application: Philippians 4.10-13, 19
- In verse 10 John records that Jesus told the disciples to have the people sit down.
 - Mark 6.39-40: they sat in companies of 100’ and 50’s
 - Luke 9.14: groups of 50
- Note in verse 11 that before the distribution of food for the people Jesus offered thanks. It is possible that Jesus used a typical Jewish thanksgiving: “Blessed be Thou, Yahweh our God, King of the world who causes bread to come from the earth”
- Read Exodus 16.8-21: Notice that Jesus does not waste any of the food.
- Read Deuteronomy 18.14-22: The people saw him as The Prophet and wanted to seize Him at that time to deliver them from the Romans. Yet, his time had not yet come (1 year from the cross).